

Political Science 206
Modern Political Philosophy
Spring Semester 2011
Clark University

Jonas Clark 206
Monday and Wednesday, 12:00 – 1:15
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This course is a survey of notable works of political philosophy written in the past two centuries. The course is organized around two themes that characterize much of the political thought of these eras. First, we shall explore the development in the 19th Century of historicism and the corresponding rejection of the notion that there are timeless, absolute “truths” that govern political activities and goals. We shall consider the arguments of Hegel and Marx that there is a historical progression in human understanding, and that this progression is evident in our political arrangements. We shall close our consideration of the 19th Century by considering Nietzsche’s rejection of the notion of historical progress.

Second, we shall consider the development of postmodernism, as characterized in the 20th Century by the writings of Heidegger, Arendt, and Rorty. Given the historicists’ rejection of absolute truth, and the Nietzschean rejection of the notion that there are even temporary, historically defined definitions of truth, each of these theorists asks how we can develop political rules and institutions that have any moral or ethical goals. While each of these philosophers developed different techniques for addressing this problem, their approaches share a sense that, as was the case for the Greeks, philosophers had become estranged from politics, and that this estrangement has been a cause of political problems. For many 20th century theorists, philosophy was “dead” – it had ceased to be useful for political or even moral ends, and it was wiser for people to seek political or moral direction from literature, poetry, or art. We shall close this section of the course with a consideration of 20th century postmodernism in literature.

All of these thinkers’ arguments are characterized by an unusual, at least in terms of the history of philosophy, level of engagement with contemporary political problems. These writers’ works either were shaped by, or were accused of shaping, political ideologies such as communism, fascism, and Nazism. Throughout the course we shall evaluate claims about the relationship between these works and totalitarian political movements of the 20th century.

This course is intended as a broad survey of 19th and 20th century thought, but it is not intended to be comprehensive. We shall, instead, consider a select number of thinkers and chart the intellectual “conversation” about their political concerns over time.

Knowledge of earlier political philosophy – including the works covered in the “Roots of Political Theory” course – will be helpful, but there are no prerequisites. The goals of this class are to acquaint you with the dominant ideas of 19th and 20th century political thought, to help you evaluate their own views on whether political truths are enduring or not, and to help you use philosophical ideas to understand modern political ideologies.

Readings

The following books are required for the course and are available at the college bookstore:

Hegel, G. W. F. *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. Translated by Leo Rauch. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishers, 1988.

Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited and translated by Robert Tucker. W. W. Norton, 1978.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Untimely Meditations*. Edited by Daniel Breazeale, Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. Harper and Row, 1977.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Kundera, Milan. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. HarperCollins, 1981.

Note: There are multiple editions and translations of several of these books. The editions I have ordered are ones that I believe are characterized by accurate translation of the works (most of which were originally written in languages other than English) and have good introductory or explanatory essays. It is fine with me if you use other editions, although you *must* consult the editions listed above when writing papers – all citations should refer to the page numbers in the editions I have ordered. All of these books will also be available at the library. If you do have a good reading knowledge of German, I encourage you to seek out German editions of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, because it may actually be more rewarding to read these works in their original language.

In addition to the books for the course, I may also place several works on reserve as the course goes on that interpret some of the theories we consider here. There are also many books in the library that I won't put on reserve but that would nonetheless be helpful to you. Many of the writers we look at in the class are quite tricky to understand, and in some cases, the excerpts we consider are best understood in the context of other works by

these philosophers that we will not be considering here. Don't be bashful about looking for secondary material to help you out in the course. Do be careful, however, that in your coursework you discuss the books we are reading.

Requirements and Grading

Attendance and Participation. The most important requirement for this class is your attendance and participation. In order to succeed in this course, you must attend class and you must come prepared to discuss the readings. I will take attendance. I also reserve the right to request that you arrive in class with written questions on the readings. Class attendance and participation will account for ten percent of your grade.

Reaction Papers: For six of the seven readings you will write a brief (2-3 page) reaction paper discussing the logic of that thinker's approach to the political problem at hand (for the first half, the use of history, and for the second half, the relevance of philosophy to political problems). For all but the Hegel paper, you should use this paper to discuss the ways in which this theorist builds upon or deviates from the prior theorists we have considered. There will be a Kundera reaction paper as well, but different rules will apply. Each of these papers will be worth ten percent of your grade, and each will be due at the last class session for each philosopher.

Class Presentation: For the final class session on each of the six theorists (that is, everyone but Kundera), three or four of you will, instead of writing a reaction paper, write a slightly longer paper discussing an aspect of the theorist's work of interest to you. You will present your argument to the class, and we will discuss your argument for part of the class period. You *must* talk with me during my office hours the Wednesday before this class session about your presentation. This paper and presentation will be worth fifteen percent of your grade.

Final Paper: You will write an 8-10 page paper, due during exam week, on a subject of your choice pertaining to the reading. You will note that I have called this a "final paper," not a term paper, because I do not see it as a lengthy research project. Instead, you should view it as an opportunity to explore a topic of interest to you in the readings that you do not feel has been adequately covered in class. Your paper should either address a topic addressed in several of the readings or it should be a detailed exploration of one theorist's ideas as discussed in our class readings and in other writings of that theorist. I will provide more details on this paper later in the semester, and I reserve the right to change the topic of this paper. This paper will be worth fifteen percent of your grade.

Summary: Class Requirements and Percent Contribution to Final Grade

Requirement	Contribution to Grade	Objective
Class attendance and participation	10%	Understanding course material
Reaction papers	60% (10% each)	Ability to identify important issues in readings
In-class Presentation	15%	Ability to discuss ideas about the readings
Final paper	15%	Identification of problems or important topics you see in the readings

Class Support:

Because this is a small class, it is my hope that you will find your own participation in this class useful, stimulating, and interesting. I am available for questions, concerns, and comments by email or voicemail. I will have regular office hours and am happy to meet with students at other times as well. Please do not hesitate to offer suggestions on how to make this class a good experience for you or on issues you would like to see covered.

A Note on Web Resources: In writing your papers, you may be tempted to avail yourself of online resources – Sparknotes, Wikipedia, and the like. This may be particularly tempting when we are reading Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. I cannot, of course, prevent you from doing this, and I did note above that I do encourage you to draw upon secondary sources if you are having trouble understanding the readings. None of the secondary sources you might find – especially these online summaries – will serve as adequate substitutes for doing the reading. The online summaries tend not to contain enough detail to aid you in discussing the works with your classmates, they generally do not provide the textual citations you will need in your essays, and they often do not clearly distinguish between the content of works we are reading in class and other writings by these authors. You will not be able to write good papers for the course if you rely on outside sources instead of the class readings. Besides, it will be apparent to me when I read your papers where the material has come from.

Academic Honesty: Finally, as you should be aware by now, the work you do in this course must be entirely your own. To be sure we all have the same understanding of academic integrity as it pertains to this course, here is what the Academic Advising *Blue Book* (p. 22) has to say on the subject:

Academic integrity is highly valued at Clark. Research, scholarship and teaching are possible only in an environment characterized by honesty and mutual trust. Academic integrity requires that your work be your own. Because of the damage that violations of academic integrity do to the intellectual climate of the University, they must be treated with the utmost seriousness and appropriate sanctions must be imposed. The maintenance of high standards of academic integrity is the concern of every member of the University community.

Plagiarism refers to the presentation of someone else's work as one's own, without proper citation of references and sources, whether or not the work has been previously published. Submitting work obtained from a professional term paper writer or company is plagiarism. Claims of ignorance about the rules of attribution, or of unintentional error are not a defense against a finding of plagiarism.

Suspected plagiarism cases will be referred to the Dean's office. If you are in doubt about whether you have provided adequate citation or used others' work properly, please talk with me before handing your paper in!

Schedule

- *Note:* Readings are listed by week, not by class session. I strongly encourage you to read slightly ahead – that is, to try to finish the readings for the week by Monday. This will enable you to write better reaction papers and to participate more effectively in discussions. Where there are multiple readings listed for a given week, you should read the works in the order they are listed on the syllabus.

January 19: Introduction to the Course

I. The Problem of History in 19th Century Continental Political Thought

January 24 and 26:

Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*

January 31 and February 2:

Marx, "Contributions to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" (pp. 16-25 and 53-65 of the *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Marx and Engels, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844" (pp. 66-125 of the *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology" (pp. 146-200 of the *Marx-Engels Reader*)

February 7 and 9:

Marx and Engels, "Selections from *Capital*" (pp. 302-438 pp. 302-376 of the *Marx-Engels Reader*)

February 14 and 16:

Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (pp. 469-500 of the *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Marx and Engels, "Theses on Feuerbach" (pp. 143-145 of the *Marx-Engels Reader*)

February 21 and 23:

Nietzsche, “David Strauss, the Confessor and Writer” (in *Untimely Meditations*)

February 28 and March 2:

Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (in *Untimely Meditations*)

March 7 and 9:

No Class – Spring Break

II. 20th Century Political Thought: Postmodernism and the Abandonment of Philosophy?

March 14 and 16:

Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche” (in *The Question Concerning Technology*)

Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” and “Science and Reflection” (in *The Question Concerning Technology*)

March 21 and 23:

Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” and “The Turning” (in *The Question Concerning Technology*)

March 28 and 30:

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Parts 1-4

April 4 and 6:

Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Parts 5 and 6

April 11 and 13:

Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Parts 1 and 2

April 18:

Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Part 3

April 20 and 25:

Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

April 27 and/or May 2:

Final thoughts

Student presentations

May 10: Final papers due